

NINE RIVERS

Blo bzang ལྷོ་བཟང་།

A kilometer from Rkang tsha Village, nine different streams combine into Nine River which runs through a narrow valley and rolls into the Yellow River, eventually flowing into the ocean. Locals drink from streams but never fetch water from Nine River. Herders, however, drive their livestock there to drink water.

One sunny day, herders on a mountaintop watched a man in his sixties collecting stones and piling them up by the river.

"He seems not to be drinking these days," a herder observed.

"Well, forty-nine days haven't passed yet."

"Maybe he'll never drink again."

"Who knows? Last year he swore to A lags he would stop drinking, but soon he was drinking again."

"Do you remember last time? He was drunk and sprawled out naked in the middle of the road, stopping cars and trucks. His family members had a really hard time taking care of him."

"Now even his wife has left him."

Twenty days earlier, his wife had cooked supper as usual and asked her stepdaughter and her husband's oldest brother to join them. They had a good meal that night, but her husband appreciated none of this. The next morning, they couldn't find her. Villagers gathered to search.

"Did she have a serious disease?"

"She went to the County Hospital with her stepdaughter because of a bellyache. They returned with some medicine. It didn't seem serious.

"The day before she went missing, some villagers saw that she had visited the local monastery, and offered butter and money so the monks would chant for her missing son.

†Blo bzang. 2019. Nine Rivers. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 58:431-432.

"Five years earlier, her son's gambling mates had come to his home and taken most of the family's property - one hundred sheep and ten yaks. After that, she didn't know where her son was."

"How pathetic!"

"Did her stepdaughter know she planned to leave?"

"I don't know," said a herder who rarely spoke.

"Anyway, it's really sad, *oM ma Ni pad+me hU~M*."

The man finished building a stone pile by the river at the place where his wife had jumped into Nine River and drowned, and where villagers had pulled her corpse from the water.

He sat by the stone pile, watching Nine River flowing on its long journey to the ocean.

TIBETAN TERMS

blo bzang ལྷོ་བཟང་།

oM ma Ni pad+me hU~M ཨོཾ་མ་ཎི་པད་མེ་ཧུཾ་མ།

rkang tsha ཀང་ཇ།